

You get off the floor at the conclusion of your stretches and then change into your outdoor clothes. You've been trying stretching as a way to relax and work on your flexibility. You breathe deeply, in through the nose and out through the mouth for 5 minutes. You are ready for anything.

But what is there to be ready for?  
Probably just going to...

## MITZI's CAFE

A laidback vibe and the smell of coffee come out of the door and you walk inside. You know that there is something for you in this cafe. You know this every time, and you are always right. You order your green tea and sit down at a table by yourself.

You get bored after a few minutes of waiting for your tea to cool. You think of taking a sip to see if it can be drunk now, but decide that instead of burning your tongue, you should try something else to occupy you while it cools. So you look through the stack of weekly readers and find one with the crossword puzzle not filled in, and you set yourself to filling it in, sitting there.

You keep waiting and eventually try sipping your tea, and it burns your tongue a bit still, so you wait and fill in the crossword. And then in comes a young man, looks like he's in his early twenties, and after he orders, he sits

down at a table near yours, with his black tea. He too gets bored and gets up and looks through the stack of weekly readers and finds one with the crossword puzzle and sets himself to fill it in.

YOUNG MAN: I'm stealing your idea.

YOU: Okay, that's fine.

You are both silent for a bit until he asks for a clue.

YOU: You're going to have to figure that out on your own.

YOUNG MAN: Oh, okay. That's fine.

He tries several words and erases his pencil marks to write better words. Then he gives up.

YOUNG MAN: That's enough of that.

YOU: You're giving up?

YOUNG MAN: I don't know, it's fine. It doesn't matter if I finish a crossword puzzle or not.

YOU: It's good practice to finish what you start.

YOUNG MAN: Why is that? Oh, I get it, that way you get in the habit of finishing things and then when there's something hard, you'll finish it.

YOU: Yeah, and you become more responsible for what you're doing.

YOUNG MAN: I've never been responsible for

anything.

YOU: Are you in college?

YOUNG MAN: Yeah, I'm a junior at UHW.

YOU: So you've worked on projects before.

YOUNG MAN: Yeah, I guess I was responsible for those. But I wasn't deeply responsible. I just got them done.

YOU: Are you kind of a lightweight person?

YOUNG MAN: Huh, I never thought about that. Maybe. Are you a responsible person?

YOU: In a way I am and in a way I'm not. I pay my bills, but I'm not any more responsible than that, really.

YOUNG MAN: You don't have any kids?

YOU: No.

YOUNG MAN: No husband?

YOU: No.

YOUNG MAN: You don't take care of your parents?

YOU: No.

YOUNG MAN: Huh. I guess you're like me. I wish I was responsible.

YOU: Well, you can always choose to be responsible.

YOUNG MAN: No, I'll never choose that. But I wish someone would *make* me be responsible. Force me to live in the world.

YOU: There are a lot of people who would be mad at you for saying that.

YOUNG MAN: They have too much responsibility?

YOU: Some of them would be mad at you for having too much freedom. Other people would be mad at you for wanting to throw away your freedom.

YOUNG MAN: Okay, here's a weird question. Are you a woman?

YOU: You mean... biologically?

YOUNG MAN: Well, it's easy for me to call you a woman because you're so much older than me. But I find it really hard to call female adults my age "women". Very strange. I can call them "girls" easily. Is it that we're not really adults? When do people become adults? These are some questions I ask. So you, are you a woman?

YOU: I think I am a woman, but I don't consider myself to be a woman.

YOUNG MAN: What do you call yourself, then? A girl?

YOU: It's strange... it's like I don't have any name for myself. I'm just a person.

YOUNG MAN: Yeah. Well, yeah, you are a person. You have to be that. Everyone is. But there's a difference between a male and a female person,

and between a child or an adult.

YOU: In between child and adult, there's adolescent.

YOUNG MAN: Right. So I can call myself by the adolescent category of "guy". But girls/women don't have that. I guess the name for an adolescent woman is "girl".

YOU: Yeah.

YOUNG MAN: How old are you?

YOU: 42.

YOUNG MAN: And are you still an adolescent?

YOU: Yeah. And no.

YOUNG MAN: In the old days, a guy could go to sea or go to war, and become a man that way. But nowadays a lot of guys don't get that chance.

YOU: You could become a father.

YOUNG MAN: But I'm not ready. But when will I ever be ready?

YOU: When your adolescence runs its course, I guess. Society isn't going to do anything to attack your adolescence. It'll just linger until you're 40 or 50 years old.

YOUNG MAN: What's it like being a 42 year old adolescent female human?

YOU: Mellow. Tired. Distant from reality. Not everyone in my position is like that though.

YOUNG MAN: You're very mature.

YOU: Thank you. But I'm still an adolescent.

YOUNG MAN: You ever think about becoming a mother?

YOU: Sometimes, but there's no reason to make that decision.

YOUNG MAN: You like your freedom too much?

YOU: No, I don't like my freedom all that much. I don't dislike it. But to become a mother is a big decision.

YOUNG MAN: Well, you don't want to do it alone.

YOU: No, definitely not.

YOUNG MAN: I guess you're getting to the age where you don't have as much time left to have kids.

YOU: You're right.

YOUNG MAN: Does that bother you?

YOU: No, not that much.

YOUNG MAN: Maybe you shouldn't become a mother.

YOU: Yeah, probably not.

YOUNG MAN: But then you'll be an adolescent for the rest of your life.

YOU: Yeah, I guess it's too late to go to sea or go

to war.

YOUNG MAN: What's the point of having kids? Is it to become a real person?

YOU: I think it can be.

YOUNG MAN: So it's a selfish act.

YOU: Selflessness often is deeply selfish.

YOUNG MAN: But in a good way.

YOU: Maybe sometimes it's actually a good thing.

YOUNG MAN: Would you bear a child in order to become a woman?

YOU: I do want to be a woman someday. Maybe when I'm tired and old enough, I'll be a woman.

YOUNG MAN: But if you had had a kid when you were nineteen, you would have become a woman then.

YOU: Probably. Well, maybe by the age of 25 I would have. At least in our culture. Have you heard of neoteny?

YOUNG MAN: No, what's that?

YOU: It's how a species prolongs childhood, usually to get some advantage. Human beings spend 18 years raising their kids to sexual maturity, well, maybe it really only takes 14 years. But a lot of animals become sexually mature within a year of birth. We invest a lot in those years, to make really well-prepared parents.

YOUNG MAN: So it's like our parents are exquisite works of art, shaped by time, when they start their families in their mid 30s?

YOU: Yeah. I guess that's the idea. People take a long time to settle on one particular self or life. And until they do, they can't commit to any one person as a mate strongly enough to take care of kids over the long term.

YOUNG MAN: We're just trying to figure ourselves out.

YOU: And this is the part of the conversation where I say, "Yeah, but take your time, you have a long time ahead of you". That's what I feel like saying. It wells up in me.

YOUNG MAN: But you're not really going to say it?

YOU: No, because it occurs to me, rationally though not emotionally, that that might not be true. Maybe we don't have a lot of time ahead of us.

YOUNG MAN: And if I could really believe that, maybe then I'd be a man.

YOU: Yeah. I think we try to get the most out of the pleasure palace of youth. Freedom, pleasure, friendship. Life is short but then you die.

YOUNG MAN: Remember your god in the days of your youth, but the god is a fulfilled life rather than a God of your whole life.

YOU: Are you religious?



YOUNG MAN: I'm a Christian.

YOU: Are you sure?

YOUNG MAN: What do you mean?

YOU: There are two ways to be a Christian: to have Christian beliefs or to fit into a Christian community.

YOUNG MAN: I do both. I go to church and have Christian beliefs.

YOU: Do you really fit in at church?

YOUNG MAN: Well... no.

YOU: Then maybe you're not a Christian.

YOUNG MAN: According to the people at church I am a Christian.

YOU: Officially. But unofficially, are you?

YOUNG MAN: I don't know, I'll have to think about that.

YOU: If God exists and is Christian, he might think you're a Christian.

YOUNG MAN: But part of being a Christian is being part of the Church.

YOU: Yeah, that's beyond me to figure out.

YOUNG MAN: Are you religious?

YOU: No, not really.

YOUNG MAN: Why did you ask if I was religious?

YOU: You remind me of someone I know who is religious.

YOUNG MAN: Is this person a Christian?

YOU: No, not really.

YOUNG MAN: But they believe in God?

YOU: Yeah. And he talks about the Bible enough that I caught your reference to "Remembering your Creator in the days of your youth".

YOUNG MAN: It seems like you want more than the god of a fulfilled life.

YOU: I do.

YOUNG MAN: But why? If you're an atheist... are you an atheist?

YOU: Yes.

YOUNG MAN: Then why do you care about anything other than feeling fulfilled in this life? Is it that you don't care about fulfillment itself?

YOU: I don't know, maybe. I guess something out there speaks to me.

YOUNG MAN: But not God?

YOU: I don't know. Why would you think it was God and not just a voice? Just Meaning itself?

YOUNG MAN: If someone says something to you, they have to be an English speaker. Unless you

Speak another language?

YOU: I just speak English.

YOUNG MAN: Okay, so people can make whatever noises they want with their mouths, but to talk *to you*, they have to speak English?

YOU: That's basically true.

YOUNG MAN: So who is it that can really speak to your heart on a deep level?

YOU: Usually just people who are both real people and have gotten to know me.

YOUNG MAN: So whatever it is that speaks to your heart is probably a person who is really real and has gotten to know you, or already knew you?

YOU: That makes sense as an argument.

YOUNG MAN: But you don't believe it? Aw, come on, what could persuade you?

YOU: I don't think an argument could persuade me. It would have to be God himself.

YOUNG MAN: How do you know that wasn't God speaking through me?

YOU: I don't know. But I'll know when God is speaking to me, if he exists.

YOUNG MAN: How will you know?

YOU: The person who's meant to receive a message knows what it means.

YOUNG MAN: So you'll just know.

YOU: Right.

YOUNG MAN: Okay. Well... uh... back to the earlier topic about what to call people.

YOU: Yeah.

YOUNG MAN: What is the point of having kids, to just perpetuate the meaningless cycle of people?

YOU: Are you really concerned with this?

YOUNG MAN: Yeah, I am.

YOU: That's one of the things that makes me think you're not really a Christian.

YOUNG MAN: Well, what is the point of having kids?

YOU: People seeking reality, like you said.

YOUNG MAN: Is there any reality other than continuing the human race?

YOU: Well, it keeps life going.

YOUNG MAN: But do you believe that? You don't want to have kids.

YOU: Yeah, I think there might be something more to life than having kids. Having kids is a way to seek reality, but seeking to achieve your own reality is one of the fakest things you can do.

YOUNG MAN: So you just have to wait until God does something to speak into your life.

YOU: Yeah, something outside of you has to speak on a very deep level, and you are not at all in control of that. All you can do is wait.

YOUNG MAN: I think you are a Christian. Officially you're not a Christian, but under the surface you are.

YOU: Hm, I never thought about that before.

YOUNG MAN: Think about it.

You like this young man's frankness. A  
pause.

YOU: I would call you a "young man".

YOUNG MAN: And I like that label. I wish I could call myself a young man.

YOU: You could if it was socially acceptable.

YOUNG MAN: Yeah. You can call me a "young man" because you're twenty years older than me. Someone who was ten years older than me might get away with it. But I can't do it. It's like I was trying to be older than myself.

YOU: I guess in "young man" there is implicit "man who is significantly younger than me".

YOUNG MAN: Yeah. But that's just the way things are.

YOU: Maybe that could change.

YOUNG MAN: I don't know if this is my hill to die on.

YOU: You should die on as many hills as you possibly can.

YOUNG MAN: That's your life advice? Do you live that way?

YOU: I'm too old for that.

YOUNG MAN: But you think that's good advice for someone else to live out? I guess it is kind of Christian. Take up your cross...

YOU: Maybe it's like you're going to one cross that's made up of multiple sub-crosses.

YOUNG MAN: And once you're on your way to one cross, might as well add another.

YOU: It's like going on a trip. Might as well go to three or four destinations if you're going to go that whole way out to the other side of the country.

YOUNG MAN: Why do you think dying on hills is a good thing if you're not a Christian?

YOU: You seem like the kind of person who would pick hills to die on that will often align with my interests.

YOUNG MAN: You trust my judgment?

YOU: Not completely.

YOUNG MAN: But enough.

YOU: Enough, I guess.

YOUNG MAN: What's your name? I'm Mason.

YOU: I'm Beth.

MASON: So do you come to this cafe a lot?

YOU: Oh yeah, all the time.

MASON: This is my first time here.

YOU: You come to cafes to study?

MASON: No, I just felt something telling me to come here tonight.

YOU: The Holy Spirit?

MASON: Yeah, probably.

YOU: You have to know these things for sure and then act like you don't know if it's God or not. Those are the rules.

MASON: Okay, thanks for telling me. It's like you want me to be a Christian.

YOU: I like being helpful when the opportunity arises.

MASON: Were you ever a Christian when you were younger?

YOU: No, but I've been around Christians a lot.

MASON: And people who aren't Christians but believe in God?

YOU: Yeah.

MASON: You're an observer.

YOU: When I was younger I wanted to be a professional writer.

MASON: That's cool. So you were the kind of person who takes notes on other people.

YOU: Yeah.

MASON: But is different than other people so that you can write about them.

YOU: Yeah.

MASON: What do you do for a living now?

YOU: I'm an editor.

MASON: You edit books?

YOU: Sometimes. Proofreading, copy-editing.

MASON: Is that a good job?

YOU: It's fine.

MASON: Where do you work?

YOU: I'm a freelancer.

MASON: So you work for yourself?

YOU: Right.

MASON: That's so cool.

YOU: What are you studying at UHW?

MASON: Software engineering. A basic way to make money.



YOU: Do you enjoy it?

MASON: Yeah, it's fun to program.

YOU: Is it your deepest passion?

MASON: No. I'm still trying to figure out my deepest passion.

YOU: How old are you?

MASON: 21.

YOU: You'd better get on that right away. It's not Jesus Christ?

MASON: Well, yes, it is, but what does Jesus want me to do? That's the question.

YOU: Better get on that.

MASON: I think I have to wait for God.

YOU: So in the meantime, what do you do?

MASON: Write programs, make money, hang out.

YOU: That could be the rest of your life on earth. Are you okay with that?

MASON: I don't know, I'll have to think about that.

YOU: Are you dating anyone?

MASON: Yeah! We've been dating for a year.

YOU: Is she okay with you writing programs?

MASON: Yeah. And with hanging out and making

money.

YOU: Is her deepest passion Jesus Christ? Or whatever it is that your deepest passion turns out to be? Is she okay with you having a deeper passion or a call or hills to die on?

MASON: I don't know.

YOU: Okay. Think about it. Pay attention.

MASON: Do you have a boyfriend?

YOU: No, I'm single.

MASON: What's that like?

YOU: Everything has its ups and downs.

MASON: So you're not happy being single?

YOU: Okay, I've been saving up this analogy for a while. Do you watch movies?

MASON: Do you?

YOU: Not very often. But I used to watch movies. A lot of romantic comedies. And a lot of other movies have love plots. And it's easy to depict a love story. People kiss or make love or whatever. Or they flirt. It's easy to spot and easy to signal.

MASON: Okay, yeah.

YOU: But someone explained to me once that it's really hard to depict celibacy.

MASON: Couldn't you show a monk living his daily life, or living out a story?

YOU: Let's say the monk's story and daily life are all about loving God...

MASON: Yeah.

YOU: Well, would the movie be about celibacy or would it be about love of God?

MASON: Oh, I see. So you can't talk about your singleness.

YOU: Not really.

MASON: So what is it that you live for?

YOU: I don't know.

MASON: If someone looked at your life, what would they think?

YOU: I think they would think I liked being in my own world and hanging out with my friends here at the cafe.

MASON: And even though you don't believe God exists, you're waiting for God?

YOU: Yeah.

MASON: I guess maybe that fits your external life, like someone watching a movie could figure that out.

YOU: Yeah, I guess so.

MASON: Are you looking for a boyfriend or husband?

YOU: No, not right now. But sometimes I think

about it.

MASON: But you don't act on it.

YOU: No, I don't.

MASON: Do you ever wonder if you're missing out by not having a relationship?

YOU: Not really. I think if I was afraid of missing out, of not getting enough fulfillment in my life, I would be in a romantic relationship right now.

MASON: Would you be happier than you are now?

YOU: I don't know.

MASON: Would you be waiting for God?

YOU: I don't know, but I would guess probably not.

MASON: Unless you found a man who had found God or was waiting for God.

YOU: Yeah.

MASON: That friend who believes in God but isn't a Christian -- you referred to him as a "he". Does he fit the description?

YOU: No, I don't think I could date him.

MASON: Why not?

YOU: I don't know, I just don't feel like it. He's a lot younger than me, so it doesn't feel like that kind of relationship.

MASON: Okay, there's another hill I want to die on. You used "relationship" in a way that it could refer to a romantic or non-romantic relationship. And that's how it should be. But there's this norm of saying that there's nothing but friendship and being in a relationship.

YOU: Okay.

MASON: But actually, friendships are relationships, and talking to strangers, there's a relationship. Family bonds are relationships. It's all relationships.

YOU: I guess a romantic relationship tends to be more serious than the others.

MASON: We certainly take them more seriously. But they all should be taken seriously.

YOU: I don't know, romantic relationships can be pretty crazy.

MASON: There's a different kind of seriousness. All relationships should be taken that kind of seriously. Romantic relationships should not be taken seriously in the way that they're taken seriously, but they should be taken seriously.

YOU: In your relationship with your girlfriend, do you take things seriously in a good way?

MASON: Sometimes. We try to not be in love with each other, but just to love each other.

YOU: I think even love can be taking someone seriously in a bad way, like if you are an enabler.

MASON: Enabler?

YOU: Someone who rescues other people, enabling them to keep destroying themselves.

MASON: Oh yeah. Well, we're not like that.

YOU: Okay. Does your relationship connect to anything outside itself? Do you two connect to the world outside better because you're together?

MASON: I think so. We're involved at our church a lot.

YOU: Okay.

MASON: Like people should try to make the world better?

YOU: That's one way to try to connect with reality.

A pause.

MASON: I have to get some studying done. But we'll have to talk more.

YOU: Okay.

MASON: Does your friend come here?

YOU: Yeah.

MASON: He sounds interesting.

YOU: Maybe you'll meet him someday.

MASON: My girlfriend would like this place. It's a home-like place.

YOU: Yeah, it's comfortable.

MASON: Okay, I'll get to my work now.

He takes his things over to a different table, sitting such that he is out of sight of you and you are out of sight of him. You sit and finish your tea.

What happened feels entirely at random to you, as though there is no meaning to chance encounters at a cafe. You wonder how he processes this, through his Christian lens. You sit and look out at the cars going by in the night, their headlights turning into taillights.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT  
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## COMMENTS

(no comments)

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